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Spiritual Progress Through Prayer

A SERIES OF EIGHT MASTERFUL LESSONS
FOR YOUR GROWTH THROUGH EFFECTIVE PRAYER



LESSON SIX

Mayan Revelation Number 308

Seeking Health and Healing Through Prayer

IN THIS LESSON:

RECOGNIZE GOD'S LOVE
AND HEALING POWER

TAKE ADVANTAGE OF
OPPORTUNITIES FOR REST

AVOID NEGATIVE THINKING

FORMULATE AFFIRMATIVE
PRAYERS

BELOVED PERFECTOR:

 SPIRITUAL progress involves our total personality - Body, Mind, Soul and Spirit. A sick person finds it difficult to think clearly and to express his loving concern for others. A worried man becomes an easy victim of disease. Therefore, it is profitable for each one of us to use every means at his disposal to secure wholeness of life.

We live in an age when astounding advances have been made in the physical and medical sciences. It would be foolish for us to ignore these, or to refuse the aid that wise physicians can give. Streptomycin and penicillin are gifts of God. So are X-rays and ultra-violet light. Year by year, God reveals more and more of His secrets to earnest seekers for Truth. Some of these are in the material fields and others are in the realm of the spirit. We should appropriate all which can contribute in any way to our well-being.

Approach this Lesson on SEEKING HEALTH AND HEALING THROUGH PRAYER with thanksgiving for the work being done by doctors and nurses who labor to relieve pain and to bind up broken bodies. Remember that many physicians and surgeons recognize that the patient's attitude plays an important part in his recovery, and that again and again a person whom they have given up as incurable makes an astounding recovery through the power that comes from prayer. While the reasons for these healings may be as difficult to analyze as the miracles performed by Christ, the facts remain. A woman who has been in a wheelchair for years, badly crippled by arthritis, finds through prayer the courage to pull herself to her feet and she learns to walk again. A man whose life is threatened by bleeding ulcers surrenders his heart to Christ and no longer worries about his business, or about his physical illness, which was so severe that surgeons had declared it to be inoperable; then in less than a month the ulcers disappear. Medical records list thousands of similar cases.

Doctors believe that their task is made easier and the patient's recovery is hastened when he believes he will regain his health. Prayer dispels worry and establishes confidence in God's power to restore vitality. Healing is accelerated by a spirit of trust.

Approach this Lesson with an eagerness to learn more of the attitudes and practices that promote wholeness of life and contribute to abundant living. Join me in the prayer:

• SO •

PRAYER

Almighty God, who art the source of health and healing, we give Thee thanks for food, and air, and water, and all which is essential to maintain our well-being. We thank Thee for physicians

and nurses who minister to us when we are ill. We thank Thee for ministers and spiritual teachers who tell us of Thy laws and Thy Love.

Whenever we are weary, anxious, or in pain, may we turn our concerns over to Thee. May we feel our weakness supported by Thy strength. Teach us to accept the calmness of mind, the peace of heart, and the healing which Thou art waiting to bestow upon us. We now turn to Thee for guidance, wisdom, and health. In the Master's name, we pray. Amen.

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RECOGNIZE GOD'S LOVE AND HEALING POWER

GHE power of faith to heal has been recognized throughout the ages. Unfortunately, men and women may accept this truth as a generality, but still hesitate to put their trust in God's love and healing power. They may ask for divine help while having sincere misgivings that their requests will be granted, or only vaguely hoping that God will intervene and rescue them from pain.

Too many of our prayers are self-centered, instead of God-centered. If our prayers are to be effectual they should be based in a recognition that our Heavenly Father is continually seeking to give us what is best. He is interested in our total well-being. It is God's plan that each child of His should have a full, well-rounded life.

Sometimes we deny God's rule by breaking His laws. Then we suffer. Sometimes we beg Him to ease our pain, but secretly we wonder whether He is merciful. Then our doubts create a chasm between us and God. Sometimes we ask God to approve of the way we are using our time, instead of asking Him to tell us what He would have us do. Then we erect a barrier between ourselves and the Father which makes it impossible for us to accept the peace and power He is offering to us.

The giant souls portrayed in the Bible were men of prayer who turned to the Almighty for guidance when they were bewildered. They turned to Him for strength when they felt unequal to the tasks that were before them. And they turned to God for healing when they were sick.

In ancient times, illness was associated with sin - with violation of some moral or divine law. Later generations discarded this idea. In the twentieth century we realize that some disease is spread by social evils; and frequently pain results from an error that could have been avoided; but there is some suffering that stems from causes that are beyond our understanding.

Physicians and psychiatrists assert that a large percentage of all physical as well as mental illness springs from either wrong living or wrong thinking. The steps necessary to restore broken health may involve repaying money gained by deceit, forgiving someone of whom we are resentful, or giving up a way of life that we know is selfish. It may be urgent that we take an about face in our health

habits, or in our social practices. How futile it is for us to pray in one fashion and to live in another! We need to make a sincere effort day after day to keep our conversation and our actions in line with the petitions we make to Almighty God.

Prayers for health and healing are ineffectual when we do not live as we pray. God's power cannot reach us when our unkind words or our selfish deeds give evidence of our insincerity.

Sometimes, however, the gulf between us and our Creator arises not out of wrongs which we have committed, but out of lack of faith. On the other hand, we find many evidences of the transforming power of a wholehearted belief in God. Perhaps the supreme example is found in the records of Christ's healing ministry. We read how the lame were able to walk again, the blind had their sight restored, and the insane were freed from the obsessions that had tortured their minds. We know that the attitude of those who were suffering played an important part in these miracles.

Recall that after blind Bartimaeus was healed, the Master said to him, "Go thy way; thy faith hath made thee whole". (Mark 10:52). To the Samaritan leper who had been cleansed He likewise said, "Arise, go thy way: thy faith hath made thee whole." (Luke 17:19).

The power of faith still exists - as real today as it was when Jesus walked this earth! It can be brought to bear upon our lives when our prayers are positive, declaring God's majesty and strength. When we feel weak or ill we should make a supreme effort to open our lives to the Divine so we can become channels through which God's power can flow. When a person does this it is not unusual for an amazing recovery to take place, and for a limping, enervated man or woman to be renewed and revitalized.

One of the most thrilling records of spiritual healing comes from the life of E. Stanley Jones. After eight years in which he had given himself unsparingly to missionary labor in India, he found that he was so close to physical collapse that he could no longer continue his work. He took a year's furlough in America, hoping rest would bring a cure. But no sooner had he returned to India and begun his preaching than the nervous exhaustion returned and he found it was impossible to go on with the planned meetings. He faced a bleak hour while considering the possibility that he might be forced to give up his work.

In desperation, Dr. Jones prayed more earnestly than he had ever prayed before. He tells us that while he was on his knees he clearly heard the voice of God saying, "Stanley, let Me do the worrying. Trust Me and you will no longer suffer from nervous exhaustion."

Dr. E. Stanley Jones says that in that crucial hour his whole being affirmed, "I will trust you, Lord." A great peace entered his soul. His spirit was so uplifted that he found, "I hardly knew I had a body." New springs of energy surged within him.

Everyone who has met this great spiritual leader during the latter years of his life knows that this was more than a period of emotional ecstasy. When Dr. Jones put his complete trust in God, hidden powers were released, which calmed his

mind, and invigorated his body. His productive labors were multiplied. Even after the age when most people retire he kept a schedule of traveling, speaking, and writing that would have exhausted many men of forty. He was sure of step, forceful in delivery, and always radiant of countenance.

The personal testimony of the healing power of prayer in the life of Stanley Jones has brought inspiration and courage to thousands of seekers. The healing stream he tapped is available to all who yearn for divine renewal. Let us consider what we must do to find it, and to drink of its waters day by day.

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AVOID NEGATIVE THINKING

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E have emphasized the importance of making our prayers God-centered, instead of self-centered. The faith that brings healing power is composed of wholehearted adoration plus personal trust in the Almighty.

Jesus said, "Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you receive it, and you will." (Mark 11:24).

Whenever our petitions for healing are jumbled cries for help, mixed with doubts of God's concern for our well-being, their efficacy is slight. If thoughts of fear chase away our confidence, the channels of healing become blocked. The prayer that puts us in the frame of mind to receive God's healing touch is one of trust in His infinite wisdom and power.

Faith leads to miracles of healing in the twentieth century, as it did in the time of Christ. You may have been deeply moved by the testimony of Catherine Marshall. Her courage after the untimely death of her famous husband, Peter Marshall, stirred the country. When she related the story of his life, she modestly recounted some of her own struggles, including her recovery from tuberculosis.

Her many duties as the wife of a busy pastor were interrupted in 1943 when she was put to bed with a lung infection. During the days of enforced quiet she turned more and more to the New Testament for help. She prayed that she might be healed by divine power, as the sick had been healed by Christ's touch. Impatiently she begged for help, yet repeated X-rays indicated the same lesions, for she was making no improvement. Then she read the story of a missionary who, after eight bedridden years, had stopped being resentful of her confinement, turned her life over to God, and soon experienced remarkable healing. Catherine Marshall was deeply moved by this account. She tells us that suddenly she seemed to see Christ standing by her side, promising her that if she would stop worrying and have complete faith in God's loving care, she would become well. From that moment she began to make a recovery. Moreover, the victory she then gained steadied her when Peter Marshall, who was giving magnificent Christian leadership in our nation's capitol, suddenly was taken home to God and left her alone. Then Mrs. Marshall's faith enabled her to gather up his sermons for publication, to write the story of his life and, incidentally, to give her own glowing witness of God's power to bring her health and strength.

Perhaps you are saying, "If prayer can bring healing, why could it not have saved the life of her husband?"

Intellectual honesty forces us to admit that every illness cannot be cured by faith. When we put our thoughts and our lives in line with God's will, - when we lose our limitations in His infinite power - very often the headache, or the neuritis, or symptoms of disease will disappear. At other times we can learn how to live triumphantly in spite of physical handicaps.

Paul prayed again and again for his "thorn in the flesh" to be removed. For some reason it was not. He never was free of his infirmity, but he learned to live above it. Paul did not say, "Because of this handicap I cannot undertake a missionary journey." He did not dwell upon his weakness, but focused his mind upon the great challenge before him. Then, with tireless effort, Paul undertook the tasks he felt called to do, and he had enough health to carry them through.

There is hardly a one of us who has not found an excuse for complaints. Some have limited financial resources. Some have only modest talents, while others are weighted with family burdens, or with a "thorn in the flesh". If we are wise we will firmly resist the temptation to hold our handicaps so close to our eyes that they block our vision of the work we are called to do, and of the resources, both physical and spiritual, that God has put at our disposal.

Avoid patterns of thinking that are destructive. Do not center your thoughts upon what you cannot do, or what you must endure. Seek to know God's will for your life and believe that you can fulfill it!

This is a far cry from Emile Coue's philosophy of autosuggestion. It requires more than repeating, "Every day, in every way, I am getting better and better.", for affirmative prayer has far greater power to set your feet on a higher road than even this formula can do. Think of God as all-powerful. Remember that He is by your side - ready to guide you and support you.

Begin your prayer by praising God for the blessings you have enjoyed. - Declare your belief that He can touch you with healing. For years Dr. Nels F. S. Ferre suffered from rheumatic pain that followed an injury to his feet. He tells us that he used to feverishly plead, "Oh, God, set me free of this agony so I can be a better preacher and teacher." One day his mother came in and found him on his knees, begging God for help. Softly, she said, "No, Nels. No. That is not the way to pray. Praise God, and thank Him. Praise Him and thank Him."

Dr. Ferre declares that this rebuke made him realize he had been praying in the wrong way. He began to fill his prayers with thanks to the Father for His unfailing goodness. He prayed in an affirmative spirit. Miraculously his suffering decreased and he was able to "block off" much of the discomfort that remained. He found he could carry on his work almost as if his pain did not exist.

This is not a unique experience. In countless instances affirmative prayer has been the avenue by which men and women were healed or strengthened. Those whose word can be trusted have assured us that when doubt was replaced by faith, their pain was eased or relieved and they felt a surge of healing and new strength.

Avoid negative thinking and you will claim for yourself God's healing power. As the Gospel hymn states it:

"Count your many blessings,
Name them one by one,
And it will surprise you
What the Lord has done."

Praise God and thank Him for His wonderful goodness to you and to all men. Dwell on His love for you personally. Trust His power to help and heal you. Positive belief will place you in the current of God's limitless love. You will be buoyed up and carried forward on the way that leads to abundant life.

Often this abundant life includes physical vigor. When this is delayed or obstructed by a persistent handicap, we can learn how to live triumphantly even while bearing an infirmity. A crippled body can house a mind and spirit that soars to great heights. We can be free from chains of negative thinking if we will concentrate upon the contributions we are still able to make.

Even one who is bedridden can voice intercessory prayers for others who need God's help. By cheerfully bearing our sufferings we can bring courage to those who are carrying burdens of their own. Trusting that ultimately God will give us our reward, each day we can be brave and cheerful; and we can know the peace and joy of those who are not tormented by doubt.

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TAKE ADVANTAGE OF OPPORTUNITIES FOR REST

*J*N earlier Lessons we stressed the importance of regular periods of meditation and prayer. You know that when you commune with God in a quiet place you can hear His words of guidance and feel His healing touch. Usually you choose the time and the spot where you will seek God's presence. Now consider what possible advantage can come from times of enforced rest:

Several years ago, after filling out forms necessary to secure my admission to a hospital, I was handed a booklet titled, "Enjoy Your Horizontal Holiday." Surgery was to interfere with my busy life. How could I enjoy the days that I must spend flat in bed? That was the question I was asked to consider at that time, and one which I have pondered on other occasions when it has been necessary to lay aside my usual routine in order to recuperate from illness.

Granted that earnest, affirmative prayer can bring miracles of healing, there are situations that require the doctor's prescription, or the surgeon's scalpel. Then we should not hesitate to trust his judgment and his treatment. God can bless the physician's ministry, and our recovery will be speeded when we assume a calm, cooperative frame of mind.

When you face such an hour, do not become irritated because you have been forced to leave your work. Use the freedom from it to reevaluate its worth.

Use the extended moments of quiet for inspirational reading, meditation, and prayer. Even when you are forced to lie perfectly still you can stretch your mind and widen your horizons. A brush with death should make you check your daily calendar to see how many of your activities bring anything of eternal value to your own soul, or to the lives of those about you.

A "horizontal holiday", or a period of convalescence, provides an ideal opportunity for spiritual search. Select reading that will bring you new insights. When your eyes become tired, close the book and think upon the truth you have found within it.

Keep your thinking constructive. Refuse to dwell upon your infirmities. Picture yourself as well, and plan what you will do when you are stronger. Believe that God still has a noble work for you to do, possibly greater than any you have yet attempted. Don't become restless. Use well your enforced leisure and be content to let your work wait for His appointed time.

Refrain from frantically begging that one particular pain be eased, or some specific infirmity removed. Pray, instead, that God will open your eyes so you will become more vividly aware of His Presence. Ask Him to keep you humble, so you will know, moment by moment, that His ways are higher than your ways. Open your whole being to His light. Expose your body, mind, spirit and soul to His healing touch.

This is the kind of prayer that is most effective in opening the sluice gates so streams of divine healing can flow into your life. When we acknowledge our complete dependence upon God, like Paul, we can hear the Heavenly Father saying: "My grace is sufficient for thee." We learn the meaning of the words: "My strength is made perfect in weakness, for when I am weak, then I am strong." (See II Corinthians 12:10).

How can this be? Look at the mother who has been hectically rushing from one activity to another until critical illness forces her to stop. Then she checks her calendar for the month ahead, and crosses out the engagements that have only secondary worth. She returns to her family a wiser and calmer person than she had been before.

Look at the business man who had thought it was necessary to accept social practices that revolted him, in order to maintain his position. A near-fatal accident prompted him to do some deep thinking. He found new values in life and discovered spiritual satisfactions he had been missing.

Look at a young woman who has been stricken with an incurable disease. Through affirmative prayer she has not achieved what the medical record would list as recovery, but she has found the courage to drag herself to her feet. Sitting on a high stool she prepares the vegetables for dinner. With the aid of crutches she sets the table and serves her family. Her husband has to help her out of bed each morning. Then she prays: "Thank you God for this day. Give me strength to do what I must do. I know Your Power is inexhaustible, and You will give me what I need." Each hour she does as much as she can, takes a period for rest and prayer, and then begins again. Her family and friends say that it is a miracle that she is not bedridden. The woman declares: "My strength comes from

trusting in God, and moment by moment using all the strength I receive from Him."

We discover more resources than we knew we had when we approach our tasks with a spirit like this. We find that pain disappears, or that we are able to rise above it, when we go forward, trusting not in our own power alone but relying upon God to direct our paths, and to steady us when we falter, and to uphold us when we are weak.

Each prayer for health or healing should be begun with praise and thanksgiving to God. Follow this with a declaration that you believe in His loving concern and in His power to give you help. Conclude by a positive statement that you know that with the support of your Heavenly Father you cannot fail!

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FORMULATE AFFIRMATIVE PRAYERS


HE prayer that brings with it an impulse to seek renewal, vitality, and healing is always God-centered. We find a warning in The Theological Germanica, a source of wisdom that comes to us from the fourteenth century. It declares that when we become obsessed with our own desires we have "the Devil himself within us". For when we say, "I count myself to be my own, and say 'I', 'Me', 'Mine' and the like, God is hindered so He cannot do His work in us." In the twentieth century we would not speak of "the devil within us", but any self-centered thinking is a negative force that works to bring you harm. Avoid it as an enemy.

Begin by making your prayer a declaration of your faith in God's love and power. For example, repeat a verse like "Underneath are the everlasting arms." (Deuteronomy 33:27). Adapt this, if you wish, to "I need not depend upon my own strength alone, for underneath me are God's everlasting arms."

Words do not have magic in themselves, but they CAN direct and crystallize our thoughts. That is why each student of Mayanry in advanced Degrees is encouraged to pause after each Lesson to make his own personal affirmation. If the declaration is made with absolute sincerity it can bring not only a wave of confidence, but healing and strength.

Frequently pause and say with the Psalmist:

"Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me bless his holy name.
Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits:
Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases;
Who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies;
Who satisfieth thy mouth with good things; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's." (Psalm 103:1-5).

FOLLOW THESE INSTRUCTIONS:

- As you repeat this glorious declaration of faith, let it be more than a recital of what the Psalmist believed. Make it your very own. In the third verse, take the liberty of transposing the words slightly so that you say:

"Who forgives all my sins and shortcomings; who heals all my diseases."

- Read the great promises of the Bible, not merely as wisdom for people of ancient times, but claim them for your very own.

For example, affirm:

"Thy truths, O God, bring me life. I will find them, and follow them, and they will bring me health." (See Proverbs 4:20-22).

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The New Testament is filled with assurance that God has power to give us abundant life. The great men and women of every age have made phenomenal accomplishments by relying upon a strength beyond their own. God has guided and upheld those who gave their lives into His keeping. He will do the same for you.

Day by day, acknowledge God's glory and majesty. Thank Him for His countless blessings. Know it is His will that your life shall be filled with vitality. FOLLOW HIS LEADING, ALWAYS KEEPING IN MIND THE TRUTH THAT THOSE WHO USE ALL THEIR STRENGTH WILL BE GIVEN MORE.



AFFIRMATION

I can do great things through God, who strengthens me and guides me.

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Blessings,

Your Instructor.